

Recent Planning and Preparation (Through September 22, 2006)

NOTE to Readers. *Since the Latest Update on this website truly only covers the latest activities, which generally means what has happened in the last month or less, we have added an Archive link where anyone who's interested can see the local planning activities since November 2005. Also, visitors to our website are asked to complete a short survey if you have the time—your feedback is appreciated as it will help us know more about your needs and interests related to pandemic and avian flu.*

Pandemic Status Update

There is **no pandemic** flu to worry about at the moment, but health officials throughout the world remain on alert.

Despite some increases in the number of human cases of H5N1 (avian or bird flu), under the World Health Organization's (WHO) phasing system, the world is still in Phase 3, Pandemic Alert status. The WHO characterizes this phase as “**No or very limited human-to-human transmission**” of a new or novel strain of influenza. There have been documented cases of human-to-human transmission, but so far only close contacts have been involved—the virus does not easily transmit to health care workers or persons in casual contact with the patient.

As of September 19th, one-hundred forty-four of the 247 people diagnosed with H5N1 have died. (For a link to the latest numbers of confirmed human cases see <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/>.) There have now been 100 cases confirmed in 2006, which exceeds the number of cases for all of 2005.

As for birds, the H5N1 virus has proven to be the most virulent virus to ever affect the bird population. Some of the routine testing of wild bird flocks in the United States has resulted in the discovery of H5N1 in several birds in Michigan, Maryland, Pennsylvania and Montana. Fortunately, the H5N1 is a “lowly pathogenic” (lowly pathogenic avian influenza of LPAI) version of H5N1. This is sometimes referred to as the “North American” version of H5N1 as opposed to the “Asian” version, that's “highly pathogenic” (highly pathogenic avian influenza

of HPAI) and very capable of making birds very sick—it is very virulent and can be fatal. The Asian version of H5N1 is the flu virus that is killing birds, and infecting some humans. For an explanation of the North American H5N1 virus see the USDA report online at <http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usdahome?contentidonly=true&contentid=2006/09/0337.xml>. One troubling sign is that the Asian H5N1 virus that we are concerned about has been found again in some countries (Laos and Thailand) where it had disappeared after culling flocks and other preventive measures had previously eliminated H5N1 in those countries. The U.S. remains on watch for any migratory birds, and is monitoring bird populations that may bring Asian H5N1 to our continent. Some speculate that a bigger concern is that smuggled birds may be the way the disease is brought to our country.

As a precaution, hunters should be cautious in handling birds they've shot—washing hands after touching the birds and cooking them thoroughly although birds with LPAI are not considered to be a threat to either dogs or humans.

Local Preparation and Planning Activities during August

Despite our uncertainty about when the next pandemic might occur, the time to plan and prepare for a pandemic is now, before an outbreak of pandemic flu strikes. If we put off planning until there are cases of a pandemic flu, it's definitely too late to prepare. Estimates made by scientists are that, once it becomes efficient in infecting human beings anywhere in the world, a pandemic flu will likely circle the globe within three months; and, once it appears anywhere within the U.S., it will cross our nation within two weeks time.

From the very beginning the Health Department's efforts have been focused on making residents of Lincoln and Lancaster County aware of the potential impact of a pandemic. Staff members from the Department have been making presentations and providing information to the general public, local businesses and public and private agencies to be sure they have a plan in place to lessen the potential adverse effects of a pandemic on the community.

We also have completed a draft pandemic flu response plan for the Department that's being reviewed and participated in a regional pandemic flu tabletop exercising with our some of our partners on August 17th. The exercise was sponsored by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

Pandemic Awareness Activities. While a great deal of time in August was focused on the drafting of a plan, representatives from the Health Department continued to make presentations to interested groups. Up to now we have delivered over 60 talks and presentations. Of particular note was the offering of our second community forum that was held on Monday, August 7, 2006, at 6:30 in the Auld Recreation Center in Antelope Park. Lt. Governor Rick Sheehy, Nebraska's Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Joanne Schaefer and Doug Ahlberg, Lancaster County Emergency Management Director, joined us in the presentation. Also, on September 6th, a presentation to food service managers was held at the Health Department. In addition, in other activities:

- Member companies in WorkWell were asked to fill out the business checklist online.
- There are plans to hold a meeting of our Community Pandemic Coordinating Committee on October 12th. More news will be forthcoming to those partners identified.

Other Efforts. The Health Department also uses the City's InterLinc website, www.Lincoln.ne.gov, as a means to get information out to the public. Readers may have noted some additions to our webpage, including in our featured box, a .pdf file listing one way to accumulate emergency supplies over a 5-week period. In addition, as indicated above, the webpage now includes Spanish versions of several checklists listed as [En Español (PDF)]. There's also a survey that readers can take, with an opportunity to give us feedback

We will try to accommodate presentations with groups that wish to learn more about pandemic flu, and several presentations are already scheduled. We also hope to make more inroads with local businesses to get them planning. If you are a company that would like to know more about pandemic flu and how to plan for it, please call Mark Hosking at 441-6204, to see if he can assist you.

The Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department and a number of local agencies and organizations are preparing for a pandemic. Have you begun making plans yet?